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When Was Tomorrow? Manipulation of Time and Memory in the Works of Mexican Onda

When literary critic Margo Glantz coined the term 'la literatura de la Onda'¹ it was an attempt to describe the works of young Mexican writers influenced by La Onda, or contemporary Mexican counterculture. Although many writers experimented with this new style, the works of only three authors – José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz and Parménides García Saldaña – have been defined as comprising the movement. The convoluted nature of the typical Onda text is the result of the changes the movement underwent between 1965 and 1969.² The Onda text is affected by the changes of the narratorship, the relationship between the narrator and the protagonist(s), and the transcultural influences on the Onda language. The result is a new style termed by some critics 'the Onda banter.'³ In short, the text has all but lost its narrative purpose and become a self-editing and self-recreating entity that attempts to combine a great variety of intertextual and, at times, intratextual influences and non-literary textual forms. The majority of later Onda texts are not concerned with the plot or character development in a traditional manner. Instead, they play with timelines and character restructuring, and at the same time try to deliver a storyline, challenging and ultimately destroying traditional narrative norms. While this process is characteristic of all the Onda works, this analysis will concentrate on the stories 'La Tumba' (1964) by José Agustín and 'En noches como ésta' (1971)

¹ 'the Onda literature' (Glantz 1971: 30). All translations, unless indicated otherwise, are my own – V.C.

² Eric Zolov examines the effect of contemporary counterculture on the literary production of the Onda movement (Zolov 1999: 159–63).

³ See Carter and Schmidt 1986.